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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 COTONOU 000366

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DAKAR AND TOGO, PLEASE PASS TO USN/USCG PARTY

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR BENIN VISIT OF USN VICE ADMIRAL STUFFLEBEAM/USCG VICE ADMIRAL PETERMAN

REF: (A) COMLANTAREA 161845Z APR 07; (B) BONE-ANKI DOSSO LETTER AND ATTACHED REPORT (delivered May 10, 2007); (C) STATE 59359; (D) 06 STATE 201852

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Your visit to Benin on May 22 to discuss International Port Security and maritime cooperation and safety issues (REF A) will help emphasize to Beninese authorities the importance that the US government places on these two subjects in the Gulf of Guinea region. You will find your Beninese interlocutors eager and willing to cooperate with us in both regards, but plagued by a lack of capacity as regards meeting the necessary standards. END SUMMARY.

INTERNATIONAL PORT SECURITY

¶2. (U) On port security, the Autonomous Port of Cotonou (PAC) has been aware since the out-briefing by the USCG evaluation team at the end of their August 28-30, 2006 visit to Cotonou of the significant deficiencies of the PAC as regards meeting the minimum requirements of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. Key deficiencies described were, most importantly, in the areas of access control, perimeter barriers and training of stakeholders on the PAC's security plan. Over the past eight months, however, we have seen little success at addressing these areas. Some work has been done on extending the perimeter wall, but it remains incomplete. Various decrees have been issued to tighten up personnel access to the Port, and there is some evidence that guards at the gates are now more rigorous about demanding identification, but the port is still congested and teeming with people who do not appear to have any legitimate need to be there.

¶3. (U) We hope that delivery of the complete report by the USCG team (REF B) to the PAC's Designated Authority on ISPS at the Merchant Marine on May 10, and to the Director General of the PAC on May 14, will energize them. We are currently trying to schedule appointments at the Foreign Ministry and with the Minister of Transportation to deliver the formal demarche (REF C) that will begin the 90-day period after which conditions of entry will be imposed on vessels coming to the U.S. from Benin. Both the DG of the Merchant Marine and the DG of the Port are aware the demarche is coming. We hope that we will be able to deliver this demarche prior to your May 22 meeting with the Transport Minister and Port

officials. We will update you on this during your in-brief that morning.

¶14. (U) In our discussions with the Port officials on ISPS, we have repeatedly stressed that the measures necessary to meet ISPS Code standards are not costly. They require only the administrative capacity to elaborate them and the will to implement them. We have also stressed, however, that failure to achieve them would have serious consequences, as the conditions of entry that the US Coast Guard would be required to apply could well discourage shippers from using the Port of Cotonou.

¶15. (U) Related to, but separate from, these efforts to meet minimum ISPS standards, the Millennium Challenge Corporation is in the first year of implementation of a \$307 million Compact with Benin. The single largest area of MCC activity is in improving the Port of Cotonou. Some of the MCC projects will help the PAC to adhere to ISPS standards, including possible projects such as video surveillance equipment. These improvements, however, are unlikely to be completed for another two to three years. Our message to the Port officials is that the MCC-funded improvements, while they would contribute to port security and are important to the efficient functioning of the port, are not needed to meet the minimum standards required by the US Coast Guard. The Port officials have understood this message, but still note that some measures, such as radios or other communications equipment for security personnel, do cost money.

MARITIME SECURITY AND DOMAIN AWARENESS

¶16. (U) Benin was an eager and active host for the November 15, 2006, Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Ministerial. Beninese officials are aware of the content of the Communique and Action Plan adopted at that meeting (REF D). Implementation of the Action Plan, however, has been lacking. As far as we are informed Benin has not issued an

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executive directive on maritime security, conducted a public awareness campaign, or designated a national maritime authority. Nor has it established an inter-agency working group on maritime safety beyond that which was set up to organize the November Ministerial, and which we do not believe has met since the event concluded.

¶17. (U) The one area where we are aware of some activity has been in acquiring and installing appropriate systems, such as AIS, to improve maritime domain awareness. The French Government has established a project to provide Benin (along with Togo) with an AIS and ground-based radar capacity. According to a conversation with the French DATT, LtCol Patrick Joleaud, on May 9, however, the project has not progressed as smoothly as he had hoped. The French have the funding approved and available for the system, and are ready to install at least the initial station at the Port of Cotonou. He reported, however, that the Beninese side has been unable to confirm the details for the system's operation and maintenance, and therefore installation is on hold. Joleaud added that the French plan is currently to install just the one station at Cotonou. If that goes well, he said, the French would then be prepared to finance installation of other stations along the coast to provide complete coverage. We hope the French will be able to provide more details on the project's status in advance of your visit.

OTHER MARITIME AND MILITARY COOPERATION

¶18. (U) Despite these capacity challenges, the Beninese are very interested in exploring additional possibilities for military assistance and cooperation. Their interest in restarting IMET programs was a major factor in convincing them to agree to a "non-surrender" (Article 98) agreement with us in August 2005. They have been keen to get a larger IMET allocation, in part to be able to send more officers to staff or war college programs. Benin currently has an IMET student at the Naval Staff College, who is due to return to Benin next month. Ship visits, by the FFG USS ELROD in

September 2006 and the USCG Cutter LEGARE in March 2007, have also gone very well. In particular, these visits have helped reinforce the November Ministerial's message of USG interest in promoting maritime domain awareness.

¶9. (U) Benin is also on tap to receive \$200,000 worth of equipment under FMF for border and coastal security functions. We need to work with them further to define their specific needs for this funding. We are also working together with the DAO and ODC in Accra on a possible 1206 program for Benin that would supply two 27-foot boats to the Navy. (NOTE: The GoB has been notified of the FMF funds, but we have not formally discussed the 1206 possibility with them, as the availability of those funds is not yet certain. END NOTE). The patrol boats would be particularly welcome. The Beninese Navy has gone long periods without any seaworthy craft, although CNO Ahoyo recently told the Ambassador of the refurbishment of two small ships so that the ships can now patrol.

¶10. (U) The Beninese remain eager participants in other military cooperation areas. US-provided (ACOTA) training for peacekeeping has played an important role in helping the Beninese maintain their peacekeeping troop deployments of one battalion each in the UN missions in Cote d'Ivoire and DR Congo. So far, Benin has balked when asked to consider a third simultaneous large deployment to other possible missions in Somalia or Sudan. It has made contributions of smaller contingents of military observers or civpol in Darfur and Haiti, respectively. We hope that at some point in the future the GoB may be able to muster a third concurrent multilateral mission as well.

¶11. (U) President Yayi, Defense Minister N'Douro, and Chief of the General Staff General Mathieu Boni have all stressed their desire to increase military cooperation with the U.S. N'Douro asked to pay an official visit to Washington to have such discussions at the Pentagon in April, but the timing did not work. They are particularly keen on enhancing their communications and border security capabilities. We expect he will raise his desire to visit Washington with you. While we cannot promise a meeting with the Defense Secretary, Washington tells us that meetings with DASD Whelan and principals in the Africa Bureau at State would be

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possible, if mutually agreeable dates could be found.

¶12. (U) In a meeting with the Ambassador, General Boni specifically requested U.S. assistance with equipment, notably items such as boots and parachutes, as well as trucks that could be used for peacekeeping deployments' transportation requirements. He also requested additional training opportunities, including: i) increased IMET programs; ii) slots at US War College programs (he said no Beninese had ever attended); iii) parachute training and equipment, including use of a plane for training; and iv) up to a half dozen college or university scholarships for Beninese girls who have completed the Beninese military high school program (Boni noted that Belgium provided 6 scholarship slots each year at its military academy, to which Benin sends three boys and three girls).

POLITICAL CONTEXT

¶13. (U) Benin is one of the most stable and democratic countries in Africa. The Yayi Administration, in office since April 2006, appears genuinely determined to promote a reform agenda, fight corruption and spend more of its resources on basic human needs. Its performance so far, however, has not always met its ambitions, in large part because of the same sorts of administrative capacity challenges that have hobbled military cooperation. With just under four years remaining in its term, it still has great potential to achieve real reform and create the conditions for economic growth.

¶14. (U) Legislative elections in March 2007, while not producing a landslide of support for Yayi, did show that he still has strong political appeal, and the coalition he supported has been able to cobble together a majority in the National Assembly. One outcome, however, is that a reshuffle of government ministers is imminent,

although it has not yet been announced as of this writing. Both of the Ministers you are scheduled to meet, Transport and National Defense, are likely to keep their jobs, but nothing is guaranteed, and we will be able to update you at your in-briefing on May 22.

SECURITY NOTES

¶15. (U) Benin is rated HIGH for crime and MEDIUM for transnational terrorism. The community in general is affected most by street crime in all parts of Benin. There has been a slight increase over the past two years in carjackings carried out by gangs of criminals. There are no known terrorist organizations operating in Benin, and the Beninese government supports the United States in the War Against Terrorism.

BIO NOTES

¶16. (U) Defense Minister Issifou Kogui N'DOURO has been Defense Minister since the beginning of the Yayi Administration in April 2006. A former official of the International Organization of La Francophonie, he speaks only limited English, but in all of our meetings has been effusive in his praise of the United States, stressing his appreciation of American values and the American work ethic. He brought only a limited background in military affairs to his current position, but he is among the closer confidantes of the President in the cabinet. We have heard no reports that his lack of a military background has caused him any problems with the members of the Beninese Armed Forces, who have adopted a strongly apolitical nature since the difficult days of Benin's Marxist revolutionary era in the 1970's and 1980's.

¶17. (U) Transport Minister Richard Senou originally served as an Economic Advisor to President Yayi, and was named a minister when Yayi dismissed his predecessor in November 2006. This after both the GoG Maritime Safety Ministerial and the USCG ISPS evaluation visit, so Minister Senou was not directly involved in either event.

An outspoken public figure, Senou was a presidential candidate in March 2006, where he came around 20th out of 26 candidates in the first round and was among the first of the defeated candidates to endorse Yayi for the second round. A former World Bank official, Senou speaks decent English, and still has a house and children in the U.S.

¶18. (U) Director General of the Port of Cotonou Christophe Aguessy

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is, like many Yayi appointees and the President himself, a former banker. He has been in his current position at the PAC approximately one year. He says he has tried hard to institute reforms at the Port, but expresses some frustration that his decisions and policies are not always respected or implemented by his subordinates.

BROWN